

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 IO-13 DPW-01 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 EUR-25 RSR-01 /143 W

----- 108087

R 310650Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6605

USDEL JEC PARIS

CINCPAC

S E C R E T SAIGON 15699

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS VS

SUBJECT: MILITARY ASSESSMENT MR-1

THE FOLLOWING SENT AMEMBASSY SAIGON FROM AMCONSUL DANANG 30 AUG 73
REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION.

QUOTE:

S E C R E T DANANG 1075

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS VS

SUBJECT: MILITARY ASSESSMENT MR-1

DAO FOR AOSOP-IS

EMBASSY FOR POL/MIL

1. THE FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE
1ST ARVN DIVISION'S AREA OF OPERATION (AO) WAS COMPILED BY
MR. JAMES W. SCHOFIELD, RLO/USS FROM LIAISON CONTACTS WITH
BRIGADIER GENERAL (BG) LE VAN THAN, COMMANDER OF THE 1ST
DIVISION; 1ST DIVISION CHIEF OF STAFF, COLONEL (COL) NGUYEN
VAN DIEN; 1ST DIVISION G3, LIEUTENANT COLONEL (LTC) TRUONG NHU
MAN; 1ST DIVISION G2, MAJOR (MAJ) NGUYEN DOC BO; I CORPS FORWARD

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G3, LTC NGUYEN THANH NHAN; I CORPS FORWARD G2, LTC TRAN KHAC

DAN; 54TH REGIMENT (REGT)/1ST DIVISION COMMANDER, LTC NGUYEN TRANH NHA; 3D REGT, 1ST DIVISION EXECUTIVE OFFICER (XO) LTC NGUYEN PHU THO AND DAILY LIAISON WITH COL PHAM VAN NGHIN, I CORPS G3; COL PHAM VAN PHO, I CORPS G2; LTC BUI SI KHANG, DEPUTY G2 AND LTC LE HUU TU, TACTICAL OPERATIONS CENTER (TOC) COMMANDER.

2. SINCE THE JANUARY 1973 CEASEFIRE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE CONTINUED TO SEND SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT INTO MR-1. THEY HAVE EXTENDED THEIR LINES OF COMMUNICATION (LOC) AND ESTABLISHED SUPPLY DEPOTS IN AREAS CONTESTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM. THESE LOC'S EXTEND TO POINTS JUST SHORT OF ESTABLISHED GVN POSITIONS. ARVN FORWARD OUTPOSTS HAVE BEEN HARASSED AND TESTED IN AN ATTEMPT TO PUSH GVN LINES TO THE EAST AND TO SECURE INFILTRATION ROUTES INTO THE LOWLANDS. THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTENSION OF THESE LOC'S HAVE IMPROVED THE NVA/VC TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC POSITION AS COMPARED WITH THAT EXISTING PRIOR TO THE CEASEFIRE.

3. ALTHOUGH THE COMMUNISTS NOW HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO LAUNCH A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN THE 1ST DIVISION'S AO, THEY ARE NOT EXPECTED TO DO SO OVER THE NEAR TERM. SUCH A MESSIVE, OVERT DISREGARD FOR THE PARIS CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT WOULD POSE OBVIOUS POLITICAL AS WELL AS MILITARY RISKS, WHICH THE COMMUNISTS WOULD PROBABLY PREFER TO POSTPONE. THUS, IT APPEARS THAT FOR THE PRESENT, THE NVA/VC ARE ADOPTING A TWO-PRONGED STRATEGY.

FIRSTLY, THEY ARE HARASSING AND TESTING FRIENDLY OUTPOSTS AND UNITS ALONG THE JANUARY 1973 CEASEFIRE LINE IN AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN IMPORTANT TERRAIN FEATURES AND SECURE INFILTRATION ROUTES. IF MET BY A STRONG REACTION, HOWEVER, THEY DISENGAGE. THEY HAVE BEEN ECONOMICAL IN THE USE OF THEIR FORCES, UTILIZING LESS THAN TWO BATTALIONS IN ANY PARTICSBAR PROBE, BUT MAINTAINING THE CAPABILITY TO STRIKE IN ANY SECTOR, THUS FORCING THE ARVN TO MAINTAIN A STATE OF READINESS ALONG ITS ENTIRE FRONT. TO MAINTAIN THIS FRONT FORCES THE GVN TO EXPEND RESOURCES BADLY NEEDED ELSEWHERE. THE NVA/VC HAVE SHOWN PARTICULAR INTEREST IN AREAS OFFERING ACCESS CORRIDORS TO THE LOWLANDS. CONTROL OF THESE CORRIDORS WOULD PLACE ENEMY UNITS AND ARTILLERY CLOSE TO FUTURE TARGETS AND OPEN INFILTRATION ROUTES INTO THE POPULATED REGIONS AND PROVIDE ROUTES TO MOVE SUPPLIES PURCHASED IN THE

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LOWLANDS INTO THE HILLS. (THE COMMUNISTS HAVE PURCHASED RICE IN GVN TERRITORY AT ABOVE-MARKET PRICES. SUCH PURCHASES ADD TO INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AN ECONOMIC WEAKNESS THAT COMMUNIST PROPAGANDISTS ARE EXPLOITING. ALSO, EVEN AT INFLATED PRICES, IT IS PROBABLY MORE ECONOMICAL FOR THE NVA/VC TO PURCHASE RICE IN GVN TERRITORY THAN TO BRING IT DOWN FROM THE NORTH).

SECONDLY, THE COMMUNISTS ARE ESTABLISHING AND EXPANDING THEIR

INFRASTRUCTURE IN PREPARATION FOR PRELIMINARY STAGES OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY AGAINST THE POPULATION. THIS ACTIVITY IS STILL AT THE GRASSROOTS AND IS DIFFICULT TO DETECT.

4. DURING THE MONTH OF AUGUST NVA/VC ELEMENTS TESTED THE 3D AND 54TH REGIMENTS AND HARASSED REGIONAL FORCE UNITS AT BACH MA.

A. THE WEEK BEGINNING AUGUST 13, ENEMY UNITS, POSSIBLY ELEMENTS OF THE 5TH NVA REGIMENT, INCREASED THEIR ACTIVITY IN THE 54TH ARVN REGIMENT'S AO IN SOUTHWESTERN NAM HOA DISTRICT IN THE AREA OF YD7802, YD9301, AND YD8902. THIS CONSISTED OF AFB'S AND GROUND ATTACKS. THE 54TH REGIMENT REACTED STRONGLY AND COMMUNIST ACTIVITY DECLINED BY THE END OF THE WEEK.

B. ON 17 AND 18 AUGUST, UNITS OF THE 29TH NVA REGIMENT (PROBABLE) BEGAN TO SHOW AN INTEREST IN THE OBSERVATION POST OVERLOOKING SONG BO VALLEY IN THE YD5717 SECTOR NORTHWEST OF HUE. ON 20 AUGUST, ELEMENTS OF THE 3D ARVN REGIMENT RECEIVED OVER 1,500 ROUNDS OF ARTILLERY/MORTAR FIRE AT YD5617 AND YD6522; TWO FORWARD OBSERVATION POSTS OF THE THREE BATTALIONS, 2D REGIMENT IN THE YD560135 AREA WERE LOST, BUT RECOVERED WITH LIGHT CONTACT IN THE MORNING OF 21 AUGUST. BY THE END OF THE WEEK, NVA/VC ACTIVITY HAD SPORADIC AFB'S AND CONTACT. ON 29 AUGUST THE 2ND BATTALION OF THE 51ST REGIMENT REINFORCED THE 3RD REGIMENT.

C. FOR SEVERAL WEEKS THE ENEMY HAS BEEN HARASSING THE REGIONAL FORCE BATTALION ON BACH MA MOUNTAIN AND HAS FREQUENTLY FIRED ON RESUPPLY AIRCRAFT. AS A RESULT, FRIENDLY ROAD CONSTRUCTION HAS BEEN HALTED. THE WEEK OF 19 AUGUST, THE GVN USED LOUD-SPEAKER AIRCRAFT TO WARN THE HARASSING FORCES THAT IF THEY CONTINUED TO FIRE ON RESUPPLY HELICOPTERS TACTICAL AIRCRAFT WOULD RETALIATE. ON 22 AUGUST A-37 AIRCRAFT STRUCK AW AND A
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MORTAR POSITION AT ZC0692 IN SUPPORT OF RESUPPLY EFFORTS AT BACH MA. AFTER THE AIR STRIKES, THE OPPOSING FORCES APPEALED FOR AN END TO THE AIR STRIKES AND AGREED TO QUIT HARASSING RESUPPLY HELICOPTERS. ON 24 AUGUST, A SMALL OUTPOST 1 KM NORTH OF BACH MA RECEIVED 30 ROUNDS OF B-40 AND B-41 FIRE CAUSING 12 FRIENDLY WOUNDED. THE BACH MA SITUATION IS SOMEWHAT CONFUSED. THE GVN CONSIDERED BACH MA WITHIN ITS ZONE OF CONTROL AT THE TIME OF THE CEASEFIRE BUT DID NOT OCCUPY IT UNTIL EARLY JUNE, WHEN THE 126TH REGIONAL FORCE BATTALION MOVED INTO THE SECTOR TO SECURE A RESETTLEMENT AREA.

D. THE I CORPS G2, MAJOR BO, FEELS THAT THE NVA/VC IS PREPARING FOR A PROBE IN THE AREA SOUTH OF BASTOGNE (YD6209) IN THE 2D REGIMENT'S AO IN THE NEXT ONE OR TWO WEEKS. THE PRIMARY INDICATION IS INCREASED ENEMY ACTIVITY ON ROUTE 73 BETWEEN

YC6194 AND YC6398.

5. MOST I CORPS AND 1ST DIVISION OFFICERS SHOW SOME ANXIETY ABOUT THE DEVELOPING SITUATION BUT FEEL THAT UNTIL THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IS MORE FAVORABLE THE ENEMY WILL NOT LAUNCH A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN THE 1ST DIVISION'S AO AND THAT THE SITUATION WILL REMAIN STABLE. COLONEL LE KHAC LY, I CORPS FORWARD CHIEF OF STAFF, HOWEVER, APPEARS VERY PESSIMISTIC. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CONSULATE GENERAL'S POLITICAL OFFICER IN HUE, HE CONFIDED THAT HE FELT THE 3D AND 54TH REGT/1ST DIVISION COULD HARDLY BE CONSIDERED EFFECTIVE. HE ASSERTED THAT THE ENEMY MIGHT WELL TRY TO PUSH THE 1ST DIVISION OFF THE HIGH GROUND TO THE EAST AND ATTACK THE AN LO BRIDGE, THUS ISOLATING THE AIRBORNE AND MARINE DIVISIONS. COLONEL LY ESTIMATED THAT THE COMMUNISTS MIGHT LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE SOMETIME BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON. HE HEDGED THIS ESTIMATE, HOWEVER, SAYING IT WOULD DEPEND ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION. COLONEL LY DOES NOT THINK THAT THE ENEMY WILL BE ABLE TO PENETRATE TO THE AN LO BRIDGE BECAUSE OF THE STRONG AIRBORNE POSITIONS ON THIS AXIS. CONSEQUENTLY, HE EXPECTED THE ENEMY TO CONCENTRATE ON THE 1ST DIVISION'S AO. IN THIS PHASE, THE ENEMY WOULD ATTEMPT TO PUSH THE 1ST DIVISION BACK TO

AN DO

(YD6620) PUTTING PRESSURE ON HUE CITY. IT IS COLONEL LY'S OPINION THAT THE PROBES AGAINST THE 3D AND 54TH REGIMENTS SIGNAL THE BEGINNING OF THIS OPERATION.

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